TWENTIES MUSIC

A collection of poetry by

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Arthur Jaz is the pen name of Jason Michael Cook of Bloomington, Illinois. Just go with it.

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Chili mac just before bed

weird, weird dreams.

wandered through the countryside
in search of friends. visited
a fair of some kind, jumped up

propelled high into the air to land
several meters away. had to stop what
I was doing at the fair by the countryside

in order to find one missing document
for an attorney. turned out I had scanned
and printed it but then another attorney

took it to his office. ate a chicken sandwich
at McDonald's and left something very
valuable behind. went back later to find they

had no idea what I was talking about.
found a giant outdoor book sale but it was
closed. searched for a book that doesn't exist.

dragged out crates and crates of books and
(of course) never found the book I was looking
for. enrolled into my final semester of

college and didn't attend classes for so long
that when I finally decided to show up it turned
out that I couldn't even remember which classes

I was enrolled in or where they were being held
but maybe just maybe I could fool my parents
into thinking I'd been attending all along and

had been so anxious to get the best grades I
could that I flipped out and had a nervous
breakdown and then maybe the college would

give me a break if I faked
a really great nervous
breakdown…

[in the land of Roxbury dreams]

it's all the same for Bonnie and Clyde.
another day goes by, and they're still
robbing banks and shooting tellers.
but it's not really their fault,
not really.
it's their history, don't you know that?

and in the land of Roxbury dreams,
in the mythical city of South Park,
at the Odyssey Kennel Company,
it's good to know there are some
things that haven't changed.

for Bonnie,
Clyde is the moon and the sun and the stars.
for Clyde,
Bonnie is an organism of destiny.
theirs is an intertwined compulsion.
you may have to shoot them to
remove them from one another's lives.
it's their history.

don't you know that?

Hey Harry Turtledove

hey Harry Turtledove!
what if the world was not
the way it is now
and it was better or it was
worse or it was just different

what if it all was not what it is
and the South won and aliens attacked and
Mars was really called Minerva and
James Dean didn't die and what if
wars were fought with magic

and what if all the crazy things were true and
everything was absurd and there was no such
thing as cake and what if the world was not
what it really is
tell us Harry Turtledove tell us!

Anne

beauty truth love
all but imperceptible
with eyes closed
ears plugged
heart tied up in knots

that's why when Anne walks into the room
smiles at me with sheepish grin
eternal eyes crinkling cute
I focus on her glow her laughter her kiss
I am greedy wanting to take in her essence
my hand reaching out to touch her face
a blissful sigh escapes me
listening to her voice her words her song
I receive her as I give in

to love truth beauty

At Rosa Parks Commons

I could have sworn
the child was not
going to cry
when I told her
to stop chewing
on her fingers
and stay close so
I can see her
but yeah she cried
and yeah she screamed
and she stood on
the equipment
of the playground
looking like she
wanted to hitch
a ride out of
the park

Was I kidding
when I vowed I
would be a good
dad to my girl
(as if I could
vanquish all the
monsters in the
world by snapping
my fingers and
she would always
be able to
do everything
she wanted to
and the world would
be perfect and
failing that I
have to confess
that I am not
a good father)
or is it just
that Jackie's two?

Twenties music

been here long? I suspect so, you don't hear me, you're lost
inside some hidden cloud over a lake of your own devising, listening
over and over to your scratchy poppy long-ago music. you
answered when I spoke to you, but your response was automatic.

are you afraid to speak, to process, to decide? soon you will
have to exist once more, to step back outside that vapor
you hide within.
were you in such danger of exposure that you feel you have

the right to remove whatever it is that makes you thrive, that
inspires you to play those enticing songs on your CD player, the ones
most of us don't know? should it matter if we don't listen, if the people
you work with forgot or never learned or don't care about "My Blue Heaven"?

Quinn in the walk-in

when Quinn took a nap in the walk-in closet
he woke up groggy and all strung-out
he'd had a dream that clowns got in there
and they ran around with sharpened sticks
making silly faces and loud rude noises

and Quinn freaked out because he thought it was real
those clowns that were running amok
trying to provoke him and prod him and
make him their bitch and he yelled and
he tried to flip them off but they were gone

and he rubbed his eyes and he opened the door
and "who let the clowns in the walk-in" he screamed
"cause that ain't funny!" he hollered in a rage
and I said "what are you talking about?" but Quinn was still
mad because those damn clowns invaded his sleep

New neighbor

he's watching you with a crooked smile on
his face and a strawberry Fig Newton in his
mouth. you thought he was dangerous. and you
might be right. he says the wallpaper makes him
want to hurt people. the wallpaper, yes, and
the blue he sees in the sun.

he'll punch you in the face without remorse, but
if he sees an outlaw shot to death in an old
Western he'll grieve for days. yes, he's watching
you. he has eighteen eyes. the clocks collapse
when he's around. his heartbeat shatters glass.

sometimes doors lock themselves to keep him
out. he's walking toward you. he wants to talk
to you. but don't worry. he's only me.

Buffoons told me Benny

Buffoons told me Benny
was boring because his bonfires
never light even with butane
gas. I told buffoons they

were buffoons but they just
blatantly refused to listen
to me. Benny's not a bad
guy; it's bullcrap the way

those buttheads treat him. By
the time I buy a bucket of
butter for cooking breakfast at
the barracks, I believe

I'll be brilliant in terms
of brushing up on my reading
books about biology. Then
I'll know about birthing

babies in Brooklyn and
the Bronx and Bolivia; that
will be a beautiful boast to
babble to Bree Barton

and Bill and Brandon and
Bartholomew Buttermaker
when they bleat on about Benny
being boring, blabbing

"blah blah" beside buildings
beneficially befriending
bears because buttheaded buffoons
be brainless bread baskets!

Verified complaint

Plaintiff is an individual
(big deal, so am I)
residing at some address or another
and owning an automobile that looks pretty
silly when he drives it down the street.

He is suing defendant for looking at him
cross-eyed, or whatever, who cares, I
want a Vanilla Coke.
Plaintiff hereby demands a trial by jury
on the issues of damages and punitive damages,

and he's not going to get it because I
just can't
be bothered
anymore.
Dated: February 7, 2011

Quinn yells at Jay

we were walking home from Sherman's
looking at their flyer of their upcoming movie releases
and it was in September just after he moved in
and the day was gorgeous and I didn't have to work
and I don't remember what movie we rented

it might have been Half-Baked because Quinn loved
that movie and he could quote whole scenes from it
and anyway we turned onto Preston and saw Jay
and he saw us and he acted like he was breaking in
to Quinn's little canary-yellow Geo to steal it

so Quinn hollered really loud "stop messing with
my car you son of a bitch or I'll kick your ass!"
and then he turned to me and pointed at the flyer
and very calmly said "ooh look The Wedding Singer"
and I laughed for the next ten minutes straight

Blackout, 1998

in the fading light of this tumultuous
Monday in late June
it is difficult to tell which is
real:
the storm, which rained down on Atlanta
this afternoon, knocking down tree limbs
and interfering with power lines in its
windblown fury against the earth; or
the sunshine, which came out
afterwards, just long enough to make the
sky a burnt orange and so be classified
as a sunset.

and I can't help but perceive this as a
symbol for the harsh world,
made all the more harsh by occasional
bursts of chaotic light: I can
barely see my
paper at 8:43 in
the evening, but I
feel like writing.
tomorrow the
electricity will
be back on,
but by then
I'll probably
be back to
not wanting
to set
this
confusing
planet to
verbal
music.

strange how
sitting in
a room filled
with
total darkness
late at
night
can

strip
you down
to
the
bare
essentials.

I fumble
around
in
the kitchen
until I
find
the drawer
with the flashlight in it.

I am alone, a
satellite in outer space.

Jackie at the age of 4

we sit in family room and
watch our lovely daughter
(clad in pink and white
second-hand ballet dress my
wife bought at garage sale for
a buck) as she dances
majestic to Mozart symphony

she displays surprising
grace, twirling and spinning,
eyes closed, she announcing
"Ladies and Jekyllmen!"
and doing kicks and leg lifts,
then bowing to invisible
audience as real-life
parents applaud

/always it's/

tonight I'm staring at bookstore poetry shelves
hoping for words of my own to write in the notebook
but no words to give me but only lots of books
that say POEMS
NEW AND SELECTED POEMS
COLLECTED POEMS
TREASURED WRITINGS
but what they're about I can't tell tonight
not even
when I rustle pages back and forth

all these brilliant beautiful timeless people who wrote them
and they're not uplifting or taunting me
nothing magical is happening here
even though I try so hard so much
to make it happen to help it along
to wish for the words to burst forth from the
books they inhabit and to cluster onto my notebook page
in a way pleasing and perfect and true

and there are faces on the covers
happy faces brooding faces insensitive faces
but none take me in none love me tonight
not Robert Frost black and white
his profile half in shadow
or Kerouac smoking cigs
his hands in his pockets
or Sylvia smiling
her face so flawless clean
or Poe with a glare
his eyes bagged and sunken
or Rilke in thought
his back to a leafless tree
or Pablo Neruda in winter coat
his frown a drop of cold
all of them startle me ghostlike they're so still

and always it's writing dominating obsessing me
and maybe next time I come to Borders
the past-year poets will sing love songs to me
but apparently not tonight

Fasten your seatbelts

the plane is backing up
“safety features”
hey, we have wings!

ow my ears are popping
still on the ground but rolling
“those are ants, we haven’t left the ground yet”

bump bump bump bump
down the runway
crying baby (thankfully not right in front of us)

this is going on far too long
bump bump bump
seats 12R-30L

we’re not moving
we’ve stopped
is the back row of the plane the best place to be?

“cleared for departure”
moving
oh $#@#$@%*!

POP
I’m going to spontaneously combust
UP UP UP UP

UP UP
and there’s the mighty Mississip
the Ole Man as Clark Griswold said

all the world is but a cloud of fog
we’re over the clouds
“SHE RIDES!!!”

How Quinn got his name

for real his name is Josh but
when we were at the video store
not too long after he moved in
we saw the cover of a movie rental
and it had Aidan Quinn on it

and I told him I thought
he looked a lot like Aidan Quinn
and he seemed to agree
so then I tried it out by saying
"hey Quinn" and he said "what?"

and we both laughed but
the nickname fit him pretty well
so from then on I called him Quinn
and then what was really cool was
other people started calling him Quinn too

Rain ripples and snowstorms

the way I feel is what I see.
the sky is dark and almost grotesque,
a lilac-white sort of color.
the broken temperature gauge tells me
it's perpetually seventy degrees out.
I stand at the window and watch the
rain ripples hit the earth.
large water circles on a tiny puddle lake.

funny because I'd just been having a dream
that it was wintertime and I was with
my parents visiting friends we haven't seen in years.
in the dream the snow was picture-perfect.
we wanted to make a big snowman but
the dream never got that far.
in the dream I recalled what it's like
in wintertime to bundle up and go outside
to play in the snow and the muck.
when you're little you don't notice
the cold quite so much once you realize
the snow can be packed to build things.
that's one of the best parts of the entire season,
just driving around town to see the snowmen.

one Thanksgiving when I was about six
the snow was thick enough that we built a snowman.
fast-forward a couple of decades and it's raining all day
just after Thanksgiving!
but those wintry days are not far ahead for us.
I hate being snowed in,
unable to go anywhere;
yet after a snowstorm everything just looks
so gorgeous out that at times it's like
an alternate universe to the one we're used to.
it's like stepping through the wardrobe into Narnia.
trying to get *anywhere* is a huge adventure, and
you feel this immense sense of accomplishment
when you finally get there.

unless you have to go to work.
then you just wish you'd called off.

C|:-=

Fragment

set me in that secret place.
confer me with the man
who says he knows my inner face.
perhaps he has a plan.

Quinn’s exciting adventure through time and space

have I
told you
the story
about how
Quinn got

shot back
through time
and became
a pharaoh in
ancient Egypt?

remind me
to tell you
about it
one of
these days